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AUTHOR Marsh, David D.
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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the theory of organizational change and development as presented by Ronald G. Corwin in his book, "Reform and Organizational Survival: The Teacher Corps As an Instrument of Educational Change," and the implications this theory has for efforts at institutional change which are being made by the Teacher Corps. Corwin identifies two models of organizations: (a) a rational model which presumes that organizations are goal-directed entities, and (b) a political model which presumes that direction is determined by external constraints on the organization and by commitments made by the members in the course of bargaining for resources. In his analysis, Corwin integrates political and rational aspects of organizations. The author, in an attempt to expand or modify Corwin's theory, suggests a model called "muddling through" and recommends that organizations be viewed on a continuum rather than at either end of the continuum. Applying Corwin's theory to his experience with Teacher Corps projects, the author suggests that the difference between successful and unsuccessful projects seemed to lie in: (a) how adroit te staff were in dealing with political constraints, and (b) how the staff were able to deal with political crises in one aspect of the project while keeping other aspects on a rational basis. (HMD)

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Organizational Development and Teacher Corps: A Discussion of a Book by Ronald Corwin

David D. Marsh
Pacific Training and Technical Assistance Corp.
Berkeley, California

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This paper was originally to be a comparison of some of the findings and implications of Corwin's book with findings and implications from two other studies:[1]

- a study of innovation and change in Bureau of Educational Personnel Development (now called NCIES) programs conducted by Abt, Associates.
- a study of the teacher effectiveness of Teacher Corps graduates which I currently am directing.

Upon closer examination of these questions, however, I came to realize that this effort could not be easily condensed into a short paper. Consequently, I like to focus on several aspects of Corwin's book itself.

Let me say at the onset that I think this is an excellent study that is sophisticated in its conceptual framework and rich in implications for many groups. I would like to focus on the theory of organization development and change which Corwin presents and its implications for efforts at institutional change, which are being made by the Teacher Corps. Corwin presents his theory based on five orders of variables that any analysis should take into account:[2]

1. The task structure of the organizations involved, which includes their goals, role structure and incentive used.
2. Their status system and the status identities of their members, including their social backgrounds, positions of authority, technical competence and values.
3. The economic resources available to the organization and the way they are allocated.

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[1] Ronald G. Corwin. Reform and Organization Survival: The Teacher Corps As An Instrument of Educational Change. New York: John Wiley and sons, 1973.

[2] I have taken the liberty of paraphrasing or quoting pp. 351-362 in Ronald Corwin, Reform and Organizational Survival: The Teacher Corps As An Instrument of Educational Change.

4. The distribution of power and the internal process used to resolve conflict.

5. The occupational setting.

Corwin believes that, "Power is the most critical dimension because, frequently, power struggles determine the relative priorities among the other dimensions and determine the nature of the goals and role structure and the distribution of status and economic resources." Specifically power must be understood in terms of three primary integrative mechanisms:

1. Consensus, or shared expectations among the members which in turn establish authority;

2. Power, which ranges from coersion (total power) to minor influence wielded by some members over others;

3. Reciprocity, or the exchange of goods and services.

Each of these mechanisms is tied to a different theoretical model of society--the functional model, the conflict model or the exchange model. What I find exciting, however, is the way Corwin has been able, empirically, to integrate these theoretical models. This is an aspect of the study that is very exciting but also very much in need of replication and extension. Findings based on factor analysis have an unfortunate habit of disappearing when replication is attempted.

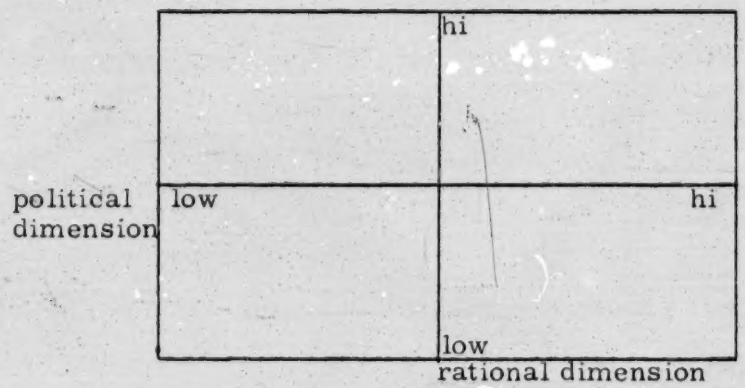
From the models of society, Corwin and others have identified two models of organization:

1. A rational model which presumes that organizations are goal-directed entities.

2. A political model which presumes that direction is determined by external constraints on the organization and by commitments made by the members in the course of bargaining for resources; official goals are only one among many possible sources of commitment and are themselves subject to compromise.

Corwin states that differences between the rational and political model stem largely from differences in priority among the variables; the models are not necessarily comprised of different variables. Another characteristic of the Corwin study which I find exciting is the way that he is able to integrate rational and political aspects of organizations in his analysis.

Yet we shouldn't assume that organizations act rationally unless under political constraints. We need to allow for a third model called "muddling through." This model would characterize an organization that didn't act rationally even though political constraints (external or internal) prevented it from doing so. I think the best way to incorporate the concept "muddling through" would be to view both the rational and political dimensions of a project as being a continuum. Thus, rationality would be a dimension of organization and any organization could be thought of as being somewhere on the continuum of being highly irrational. Similarly, each organization could be thought of as being on a continuum ranging from being under severe political constraints to not being under sever constraints. This suggests a conceptual framework as follows:



Each organization could be plotted on this chart.

This chart allows us to differentiate projects that lacked clear goals because of political constraints from projects that lacked clear goal structures because they hadn't the technical expertise (or whatever)

to do so. I don't believe I am suggesting something that is radically different from what Corwin has presented in that his measures are scales implying that some projects rate low and others high on the scale. I do think his theoretical presentation and his discussion of the findings sometimes lose sight of the distinctions I have presented.

What Corwin does present as a theoretical framework is very helpful. He presents a typology of analytical concepts including:

- power structures
- resources
- task structure
- status characteristics of the members
- occupational environment

Each of these concepts has an external dimension in the larger society and an internal dimension within the organization. Corwin describes the relationship of these concepts as follows:

> The dimensions are the links in the complex innovation process chain. (A) The political institution, in conjunction with (or in opposition to) the internal "political" process within which is fueled by economic resources. (B) This force is controlled by a goal-directed mechanism that directs the innovative thrust, evaluates progress, and adjusts to unanticipated consequences. (C) The innovation is further shaped and deflected by the status characteristics of the people involved. (D) Finally, the thrust for change must be targeted toward what Clark (1968) identified as the professional and bureaucratic components of the profession.
>
> Having posited this series of logical steps that must take place before an innovation is fully implemented, I must now add the qualification that, in practice, this process seldom occurs in only one direction. The number of linkages in this complex chain of events leaves much room for slippage, reversals and setbacks, sabotage, and selective attention between the conception of the innovation and its implementation.
>
> As a general working hypothesis, then, it can be expected that a change in any one of these dimensions requires a prior change in one or more of the other dimensions; and once a dimension changes, there will be repercussions in one or more of the remaining dimensions. For example, a shift in the distribution of power could create a goal displacement, which could affect the division of labor. Or, if an increase in the external demand for

change occurs, it can be expected that organizations will form new lingages with one another and with the environment.

In other words, in identifying the major dimensions of the innovation process, the model also helps to pinpoint where in the process problems can arise.

This conception is a vast improvement over earlier structural lag/crisis/intervention conceptions of organizational innovation.

Let me now turn to a discussion of what this conceptual framework might imply for Teacher Corps and similar efforts at institutional change. I want to focus on Corwin's theoretical model rather than on his findings. At the local project level we need some more Vince Lombardi's of organizational development. Vince Lombardi was a man of action--he could win football games. In part, his success was due to his ability to analyze his own team's strategies, the strategies of his opponents and external factors such as wind, snow, the press, etc. This analysis is where I think local project staff had a problem.

I want to use Corwin's distinction between rational and political dimensions to analyze this problem. Projects differed vastly in the abilities of their staff to operate rationally.[3] At some projects, staff weren't able to picture the future, to think in terms of goals or to set up a role structure meaningful to them. At many projects, these management functions were performed very well. What seemed to differentiate successful projects from others was not only this ability to think rationally, but rather, the ability to separate political issues from rational ones. Here I am giving my opinion only; I want everyone to understand this. But it seemed to me that projects didn't differ all that much in the political constraints facing the project. Even very successful projects experienced severe pressures from time to time. The differences seemed to me to be:

1. How adroit the staff were in dealing with this political constraints; and

[3]This statement is based on my personal experience of two years as director of a technical assistance effort to Teacher Corps projects. It is not based on data from my study of Teacher Corps.

2. How the staff were able to deal with political crises in one aspect of the project while keeping other aspects of the project on a rational basis.

I make these comments because a) I want to suggest some hypotheses for further study, and b) I want to suggest that Corwin's conceptual framework, and his findings, can be brought to bare in dealing with this situation. Using Corwin's conceptual framework, the following might be done:

1. Provide training to project staff in the use of organizational development concepts and analysis techniques as well as in ways to do such things as gain consensus for goals or mediate status problems. I think Teacher Corps staff training to date has been more extensive and of far better quality than has been the case for other programs. However, it has been limited primarily to technical or rational issues and to role definition.

2. Provide illustrations, perhaps through case studies, of low successful project directors dealt w th goal setting, conflict mediation, etc. Again Teacher Corps training has included this activity when experienced project directors assist others. Yet again the effort has been perhaps too informal.

3. On-site review and organizational assessment.

4. A new type of management plan for a local project. Previously this plan was essentially a "rational model of organization" plan: it included goals, staff responsibilities, etc. What might also be used is a "political model" management plan that identifies probably sources of conflict and alternative strategies for dealing with these.

At the national Teacher Corps level, a similar analysis needs to be done. Ultimately it would be useful to develop a master plan for national Teacher Corps assistance that was firmly and explicitly grounded in organizational development theory. In the near future it would be useful

to take specific helping strategies such as "providing technical assistance," "conducting national conferences," and "conducting project monitoring of local projects" and for each of these efforts analyze the strategy in light of Corwin's and others organizational development theory.

Let me quickly add that I think the National Teacher Corps staff is already quite effective in using organizational development notions. What I feel is needed is more careful and explicit analysis drawing on a book I think offers tremendous insights into organizational development processes.